

By Derek Wallbank and Lauren Knobbe, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - Sen. Al Franken had heard the news about Gen. Stanley McChrystal's Rolling Stone interview. The barbs directed toward the president, vice president and almost every senior diplomat in the theater not named Hillary Rodham Clinton.

It was a massive breach of protocol. Despite the protestations from the White House that McChrystal might have a shot of keeping his job, it seemed that change was inevitable.

Only one name seemed to make sense as a replacement, Franken thought - David Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command whose surge strategy is credited in large part with turning around the war in Iraq.

"It felt like the only guy you could put there," Franken said.

President Obama said that he accepted McChrystal's resignation Wednesday not because of "personal insults" but because McChrystal did not adhere to the "strict code of conduct" that is necessary for success in Afghanistan.

"The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be set by a commanding general," Obama said in a Rose Garden statement Wednesday afternoon. "It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system. And it erodes the trust that's necessary for our team to work together to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan."

In a phone conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron, Obama confirmed that U.K. Lt. Gen. Nick Parker will oversee operations in Afghanistan until Petraeus is confirmed by the Senate, something congressional watchers said is likely to happen quickly.

"I think that the president handled this as well as he could," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar in an interview Wednesday afternoon. "I support what the president did."

"I think Petraeus is a really good pick, he knows what he's doing. I think there'll be an easy transition in that he'll have the support of the troops in the field."

Rep. Tim Walz, who served in the National Guard for 24 years, also supported the president's decision and looked ahead to Petraeus' transition.

"I respect our commander-in-chief's decision, and I have full confidence in General Petraeus' ability to transition into his role smoothly and effectively. Our focus now has to be making sure the brave men and women who are serving our country in harm's way have a clear mission, the support, and the leadership they need to get the job done," Walz said.

Conditions on the ground

McChrystal's replacement came as the casualties continue to mount in Afghanistan - 76 coalition troops have died this month, putting June on track to be the deadliest month of the war to date.

Allegations stand that corruption is still rife within the government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and the Taliban have retaken parts of the country they had been forced out of in the months after the original U.S. invasion.

Karzai had lobbied to keep McChrystal, but in a phone call late Wednesday with Obama "welcomed" Petraeus' appointment, according to a White House readout of the call.

Rep. John Kline, who recently returned from a five-day visit to Afghanistan, said the goal in that country remains the same: "A stable country that denies the Taliban and al-Qaeda a safe haven from which to launch attacks against Afghanistan, Pakistan, or the U.S. and its allies."

"I think Gen. McChrystal has done an incredible job throughout his career. We owe him a great deal of thanks and respect," Kline said, adding that he was "confident" that Petraeus "has proven his leadership in Iraq and is extremely well qualified for this job."

Rep. Erik Paulsen said Petraeus' nomination will "no doubt build on the good work that has already been done in the region."

"Changing military commanders during a time of war is a decision that should never be taken lightly," Paulsen said. "And while the recent events that led to this decision are certainly regrettable, I have absolute confidence that General Petraeus is the right choice to lead our brave servicemen and women in Afghanistan."

Reps. Michele Bachmann, Jim Oberstar and Betty McCollum struck a similar tone.

"I appreciate his service and the time he gave in Afghanistan. Unfortunately the effort isn't complete there. I wish him well and hope that this mission is completed successfully," Bachmann said.

"As Commander and Chief the President need to have complete confidence in the generals who report to him," Oberstar said. "Gen. Petraeus has proven that he can develop and implement a successful strategy in the region without getting distracted by the politics and personalities of Washington D.C."

"I support President Obama's decision," McCollum agreed. "Gen. Petraeus is an extremely capable military leader. I have full confidence in his ability to execute the President's strategy in Afghanistan."

Rep. Keith Ellison said he supports the decision to replace McChrystal and reiterated his calls for more civilian aid to Afghanistan.

"I have long argued that in order to achieve peace and security in the region, we must have a civilian surge coupled with transitioning our troops out of combat missions and readying them for redeployment," Ellison said in a statement.

"I continue to call on President Obama and Gen. Petraeus to increase public diplomacy to ensure long term stability, and to bring our troops home from this near decade long conflict."